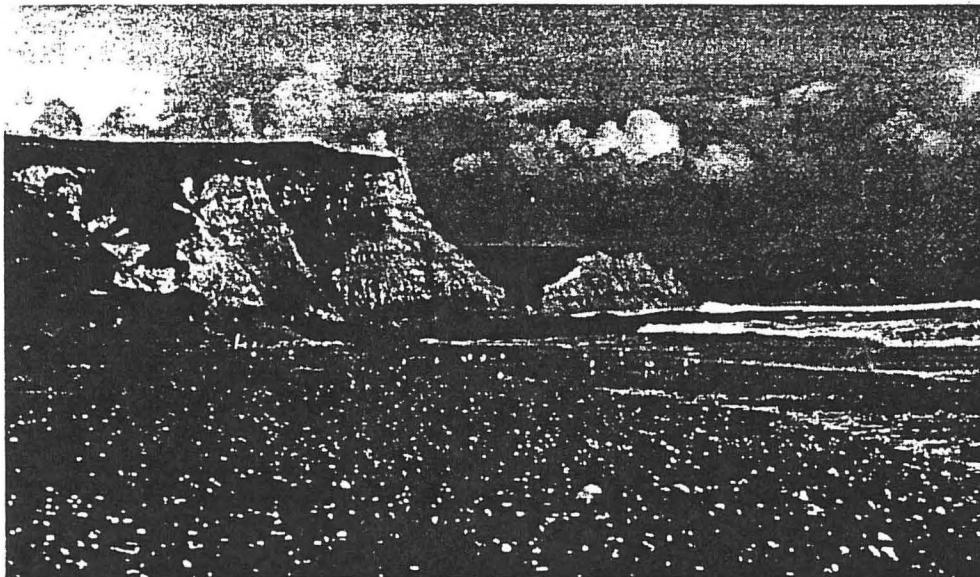


# Submerged Cultural Resources Assessment and Survey

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Drakes Bay  
Point Reyes National Seashore  
Marin County, California



Proposal by:

- ✓ NPS Submerged Cultural Resources Unit
- Point Reyes National Seashore
- San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park
- Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary
- California State Lands Commission
- ✓ Institute for Western Maritime Archeology
- ✓ Point Reyes National Seashore Association
- Drake Navigators Guild

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1982 and 1983, the National Park Service conducted an underwater remote sensing survey for the submerged lands of Drakes Bay, the Point Reyes Headlands, and the Great Beach. A number of historic shipwrecks were located and documented. The team also noted magnetic anomalies in an area that historic records indicate is a high probability zone for the location of the Manila Galleon, *San Agustin*, lost during the Cermeño expedition in 1595.

The National Park Service (NPS) operations were comprehensively reported in a monograph entitled Submerged Cultural Resources Survey of Portions of Point Reyes National Seashore and Point Reyes-Farallon Islands National Marine Sanctuary 1984, edited by Larry Murphy of the NPS Submerged Cultural Resources Unit (SCRU). The report includes an analysis of the existing archival and electronic data in order to frame a hypothesis regarding the most likely resting place of the remains of the *San Agustin*. A proposal for exploratory excavation of the site was developed and placed in the long term priority list for Cultural Resources Protection and Preservation funding in the Western Regional Office of the National Park Service in San Francisco.

This document was subsequently distributed to a wide range of individuals in the marine park management and professional archeological communities. Among those requesting a copy was Mr. Robert Marx who later filed a salvage claim on the ship. He indicated coordinates identical to those provided by the NPS except the center point was slightly seaward, putting it just out of the NPS boundary on State of California bottoms managed by the National Marine Sanctuary program.

Mr. Marx's salvage claim initiated a period of litigation that lasted most of a decade, effectively tying up any progress on the NPS proposal for site testing. It has now been 14 years since the original project, there are no legal issues pending, and it would now seem appropriate to revisit the idea of conducting subsurface tests in the area of highest probability for finding any submerged cultural resources including the *San Agustin*.

## BACKGROUND

Point Reyes and Drakes Bay have been important in the early historical development of the San Francisco region, and consequently have been the location of numerous shipwrecks. The earliest wreck dates from the period of colonial exploration when the Spanish Manila Galleon *San Agustin* was sunk in Drakes Bay in 1595. There are at least 72 other marine disasters recorded during the period 1840 to 1940, resulting in at least 30 wrecks in the area, with 15 in Drakes Bay or on the Point Reyes headlands.

Unlike the controversy over Francis Drake's visit, there is very little question concerning whether or not Sebastian Rodriguez Cermeño lost the *San Agustin* in 1595, in what is now known as Drakes Bay. The reason for this comparatively high level of confidence in Cermeño's presence in the area is that there is a personal account of his journey down the coastline to the place where his vessel was lost, while he and most of his crew were on shore. This "Declaration" was translated by Henry Wagner in "The Voyage to California of Sebastian Rodriguez Cermeño in 1595" in the California Historical Quarterly, III Number 1, April, 1924, and Wagner's Spanish Voyages to the Northwest Coast of America in the Sixteenth Century, San Francisco, California Historical Society, 1929.

To locate the *San Agustin* would be of particular significance to both researchers and resource management personnel. Shipwrecks represent unique historical events; they are particularly important not only to historians, but to social scientists. Our present-day understanding of pre-19th century ship construction, maritime culture, and shipboard interaction is extremely poor.

Therefore, test excavations of a 16th-century merchant ship, especially a ship that was involved in long distance trade with Manila, would provide invaluable data.

Most large vessels carry a full compliment of material culture that includes all the things that are necessary for a shipboard community's existence during long periods at sea. In many cases, the cargo is a prime indicator of the trade and resource exploitation networks in the part of the world in which the vessel was wrecked. Shipwrecks are also repositories for period artifacts, which are often found in a better state of preservation than when found on land. Analysis and interpretation of this material record can tell us much about prior human lifeways that is not available in historical documents, since details concerning the mundane aspects of day to day shipboard living are rarely provided.

## PROJECT RATIONALE

Established by an Act of Congress on September 13, 1962 (Public Law 87-657) and subsequently amended, Point Reyes National Seashore's enabling legislation does not specifically identify cultural resources. However, the area's *Statement for Management* discusses cultural resources and sets forth as a management objective "To identify features and events that have played a vital part in the recorded history of Point Reyes, such as earthquakes, shipwrecks. . ." Knowing the location and nature of submerged resources will enable the NPS to adequately manage, preserve, study, and protect significant shipwrecks within the Seashore. This research will also aid the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary in managing adjacent resources.

## PROPOSED PROJECT

The project will be conducted over two years. The primary objectives of the 1997-98 research project are:

- To detect and reevaluate shipwreck sites in preselected portions of the area known as Drakes Bay, Marin County.
- To locate the Manila Galleon, *San Agustin*.
- To recover selected material culture and shipwreck material from anomalies located during the research/survey phase.

The following four phases will be conducted:

### Phase I--February-September 1997

The primary objective of this phase will be to instigate coordination efforts to maximize field work in October 1997. A preliminary project team meeting was conducted in January to outline specific research objectives. A second project team meeting will be held at Point Reyes National Seashore in April to finalize research objective and project scope.

Project team will obtain all applicable permits from agencies and go through any necessary environmental review process. The agencies requiring permits include the National Park Service, National Marine Sanctuary, and California State Lands Commission.

Utilizing the research unit of the National Park Service and Drake Navigators Guild, the project team will review all pertinent historic and research data to maximize the potential of field work in and around Drakes Bay. In addition, a comprehensive literature search and a comparative artifact search will be conducted to augment existing known resources.

## **Phase II--September/October 1997 (two weeks on site)**

The primary objective would be to resurvey a two square mile area of Drakes Bay identified in the original NPS study. Instrumentation should include a magnetometer, sidescan sonar, bottom classification unit, and fathometer all interfaced with global positioning. There have been major advances in relevant technology since the original survey conducted in the early 1980s, particularly in the area of global positioning and in the software required to post-process sonar and magnetic signals. From the data, geographic information system (GIS) will produce detailed site information on scaled maps.

The second objective would be to test the efficacy of an injection dredge for removing sediment over sites in the Drakes Bay environment. The project dive team would visually investigate and remove overburden over the most promising anomalies detected. We may find that the depth for sediment may require a propwash deflector for making initial contact with cultural strata. We will review issues such as depth of artifact bearing strata and the angle of repose of the sediment.

The third objective would be to observe great white shark behavior in the area while trying different digging devices and consult with marine biologists on risk assessment regarding the sharks. This area is a breeding and feeding ground for the great white shark. SCRU has dived here on several occasions in the past when only light underwater machinery was utilized. We would want to know more about the problem before deploying unprotected divers around injection dredges or blowers and test shark repellent systems that have been used in other areas. These devices are known to attract attention of the entire food chain, and we want to ensure that divers remain at the upper end of the chain.

## **Phase III--Fall 1998**

Extended test and full excavations would take place in the fall of 1998 to investigate the source of select anomalies that may have been discovered in the survey work accomplished in the fall of 1997. Field work in previous phases would dictate locations for investigation and type of sediment removal system.

## **Phase IV--Winter 1998/99**

The San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park has agreed to assist Point Reyes National Seashore in the curation of any artifacts that are recovered. During Phase IV, staff would properly conserve and record all historic artifacts. In addition, analysis and interpretation of the recovered material culture would be conducted to reveal any new information regarding the shipwreck and life on board a historic vessel.

A final document of research conducted would be prepared for public distribution. Sites located and identified will be placed on the NPS Cultural Resources Inventory and the National Marine Shipwreck Inventory.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

There are three main agencies involved in this process, depending on where submerged cultural resources may be detected. These agencies are the National Park Service (NPS), National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMS), and California State Lands Commission. All three agencies will be filing joint permits for any ground disturbance that may occur and any cost sharing that

will take place. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Interagency Agreement are being developed to guide joint activities.

Other groups such as the Drake Navigators Guild, Sonoma State University, San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, University of California at Berkeley, and Institute for Western Maritime Archeology, will all be partners in the overall project.

## PROJECT MANAGEMENT

### Project/Technical Team Leader

Daniel Lenihan, NPS/SCRU Team

### Logistics

Mike Bell, San Francisco National Maritime Park

Don Neubacher, Point Reyes National Seashore

Ed Ueber, Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary

Peter Pelkofer, California State Lands Commission

### Archeological Support

Roger Kelly, NPS Pacific Great Basin Support Office

Adrian Praetzellis, Sonoma State University

### Support

Jim Allan, Institute for Western Maritime Archeology

Dewey Livingston, Point Reyes National Seashore

Ed Von der Porten, Drake Navigators Guild

Ray Aker, Drake Navigators Guild

### Curation

San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park

Diane Nicholson, Golden Gate National Recreation Area

Leslie Price, Point Reyes National Seashore

### Media

John Dell'Osso, Point Reyes National Seashore

## PUBLIC EDUCATION

The long-term goal of this project will be to display artifacts and provide public education at a expanded facility at the Ken Patrick Visitor Center at Drakes Beach. During the course of the project, the park will provide up-to-date press releases, publications, and general information to the public. Artifacts retrieved through this project will be displayed for the public in both short-term and permanent exhibits at the Ken Patrick Visitor Center and Bear Valley Visitor Center. These two visitor centers receive nearly 500,000 visitors annually. These displays will allow the public to witness the objects first hand on location, and to better understand the nature of their trade value.

